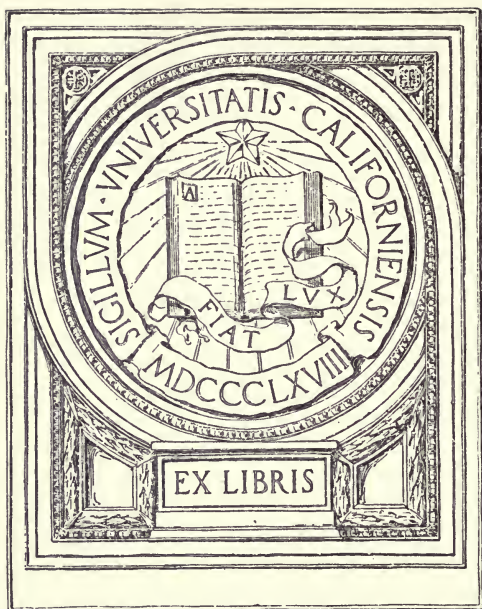


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Zachary Taylor. Letter to General Gaines.

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GENERAL TAYLOR'S LETTERS.

LETTER OF GEN. TAYLOR TO GEN. GAINES—SECRETARY MARCY'S REPRIMAND OF GEN. TAYLOR—AND GEN. TAYLOR'S REPLY; WITH THE FABLE ALLUDED TO ANNEXED.

LETTER FROM GENERAL TAYLOR TO GENERAL GAINES.

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HEADQUARTERS ARMY OF OCCUPATION OR INVASION,
Monterey, Mexico, November 9, 1846.

MY DEAR *****: Your very kind and acceptable letter of the 31st August, ***** reached me only a short time since, for which I beg leave to tender you my sincere thanks. [A few confidential remarks on certain public transactions are here omitted.]

After considerable apparent delay on the part of the Quartermasters Department, in getting steamboats into the Rio Grande adapted to its navigation, I succeeded, towards the latter part of August, in throwing forward to Camargo (a tow situated on the San Juan river, three miles from its junction with the Rio Grande, on the west side, nearly 500 miles from Brasos Island by water, and 200 by land, and 140 from this place) a considerable depot of provisions, ordnance, ammunition, and forage, and then, having brought together an important portion of my command, I determined on moving on this place. Accordingly, after collecting 1,700 pack mules, with their attendants and conductors, in the enemy's country, (the principal means of transportation for our provisions, baggage, &c.,) I left, on the 5th of September, to join my advance, which had preceded me a few days to Seralvo, a small village 75 miles on the route, which I did on the 9th, and, after waiting there a few days for some of the corps to get up, moved on and reached here on the 19th, with 6,250 men—2,700 regulars, the balance volunteers. For what took place afterwards, I must refer you to my several reports—particularly to my detailed one of the 9th ultimo.

I do not believe the authorities at Washington are at all satisfied with my conduct in regard to the terms of the capitulation entered into with the Mexican commander, which you no doubt have seen, as they have been made public through the official organ, and copied into various other newspapers. I have this moment received an answer (to my despatch announcing the surrender of Monterey, and the circumstances attending the same) from the Secretary of War, stating that "it was regretted by the President that it was not deemed advisable to insist on the terms I had proposed in my first communication to the Mexican commander in regard to giving up the city," adding that "the circumstances which dictated, no doubt justified the change." Although the terms of capitulation may be considered too liberal on our part by the President and his advisers, as well as by many others at a distance, particularly by those who do not understand the position which we occupied, (otherwise they might come to a different conclusion in regard to the matter,) yet, on due reflection, I see nothing to induce me to regret the course I pursued. The proposition on the part of General Ampudia, which had much to do in determining my course in the matter, was based on the ground that our Government had proposed to his to settle the existing difficulties by negotiation, (which I knew was the case without knowing the result,) which was then under consideration by the proper authorities, and which he (General Ampudia) had no doubt would result favorably, as the whole of his people were in favor of peace. If so, I considered the further effusion of blood not only unnecessary but improper. Their force was also considerably larger than ours, and, from the size and position of the place, we could not completely invest it; so that the greater portion of their troops, if not the whole, had they been disposed to do so, could any night have abandoned the city, at once entered the mountain passes, and effected their retreat, do what we could. Had we been put to the alternative of taking the place by storm, (which there is no doubt we should have succeeded in doing,) we should in all probability have lost fifty or a hundred men in killed, besides the wounded, which I wished to avoid, as there appeared to be a prospect of peace, even if a distant one. I also wished to avoid the destruction of women and children, which must have been very great had the storming process been resorted to. Besides, they had a very large and strong fortification a short distance from the city, which, if carried with the bayonet, must have been taken at great sacrifice of life, and, with our limited train of heavy or battering artillery, it would have required twenty or twenty-five days to take it by regular approaches.

That they should have surrendered a place nearly as strong as Quebec, well fortified under the direction of skillful engineers—their works garnished with forty-two pieces of artillery, abundantly supplied with ammunition, garrisoned with 7,000 regular and 2,000 irregular troops, in addition to some thousand citizens capable of (and no doubt actually) bearing arms, and aiding in its defence—to an opposing force of half their number, scantily supplied with provisions, and with a light train of artillery, is among the unaccountable occurrences of the times.

I am decidedly opposed to carrying the war beyond Saltillo in this direction, which place has been entirely abandoned by the Mexican forces, all of whom have been concentrated at San Luis Potosi;

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and I shall lose no time in taking possession of the former as soon as the cessation of hostilities referred to expires—which I have notified the Mexican authorities will be the case on the 13th instant, by direction of the President of the United States.

If we are (in the language of Mr. Polk and General Scott) under the necessity of "conquering a peace," and that by taking the capital of the country, we must go to Vera Cruz, take that place, and then march on to the city of Mexico. To do so in any other direction I consider out of the question. But, admitting that we conquer a peace by doing so—say at the end of the next twelve months—will the amount of blood and treasure that must be expended in doing so be compensated by the same? I think not—especially if the country we subdue is to be given up; and I imagine there are but few individuals in our country who think of annexing Mexico to the United States.

I do not intend to carry on my operations (as previously stated) beyond Saltillo, deeming it next to impracticable to do so. It then becomes a question as to what is best to be done. It seems to me that the most judicious course to be pursued on our part would be to take possession at once of the line we would accept by negotiation, extending from the Gulf of Mexico to the Pacific, and occupy the same, or keep what we already have possession of; and that, with Tampico, (which I hope to take in the course of the next month, or as soon as I can get the means of transportation,) will give us all on this side of the Sierra Madre, and, as soon as I occupy Saltillo, will include six or seven States as Provinces, thus holding Tampico, Victoria, Monterey, Saltillo, Monclova, Chihuahua, (which I presume General Wool has possession of by this time,) Santa Fe, and the Californias, and say to Mexico, "Drive us from the country"—throwing on her the responsibility and expense of carrying on offensive war; at the same time closely blockading all her ports on the Pacific and the Gulf. A course of this kind, if persevered in for a short time, would soon bring her to her proper senses, and compel her to sue for peace, provided there is a Government in the country sufficiently stable for us to treat with, which I fear will hardly be the case for many years to come. Without large reinforcements of volunteers from the United States—say ten or fifteen thousand, (those previously sent out having already been greatly reduced by sickness and other casualties,) I do not believe it would be advisable to march beyond Saltillo, which is more than two hundred miles beyond our depots on the Rio Grande—a very long line on which to keep up supplies, (over a land route in a country like this,) for a large force, and certain to be attended with an expense which will be frightful to contemplate when closely looked into.

From Saltillo to San Louis Potosi, the next place of importance on the road to the city of Mexico, is three hundred miles; one hundred and forty badly watered, where no supplies of any kind could be procured for men or horses. I have informed the War Department that 20,000 efficient men would be necessary to ensure success if we move, on that place; (a city containing a population of 60,000, where the enemy could bring together and sustain, besides the citizens, an army of 50,000,) a force which, I apprehend, will hardly be collected by us, with the train necessary to feed it, as well as to transport various other supplies, particularly ordnance and munitions of war.

In regard to the armistice, which would have expired by limitation in a few days, we lost nothing by it, as we could not move even now, had the enemy continued to occupy Saltillo; for, strange to say, the first wagon which has reached me since the declaration of war was on the 2d instant, the same day on which I received from Washington an acknowledgment of my despatch announcing the taking of Monterey; and then I received only one hundred and thirty-five; so that I have been, since May last, completely crippled, and am still so, for want of transportation. After raking and scraping the country for miles around Camargo, collecting every pack-mule and other means of transportation, I could bring here only 80,000 rations, (fifteen day's supply,) with a moderate supply of ordnance, ammunition, &c., to do which all the corps had to leave behind a portion of their camp equipage necessary for their comfort; and, in some instances among the volunteers, their personal baggage. I moved in such a way, and with such limited means that, had I not succeeded, I should no doubt have been severely reprimanded, if nothing worse. I did so to sustain the Administration.

Of the two regiments of mounted men from Tennessee and Kentucky, who left their respective States to join me in June, the latter has just reached Camargo; the former had not got to Matamoros at the latest dates from there. Admitting that they will be as long in returning as in getting here, (to say nothing of the time necessary to recruit their horses,) and were to be discharged in time to reach their homes, they could serve in Mexico but a very short time.

The foregoing remarks are not made with the view of finding fault with any one, but to point out the difficulties with which I have had to contend.

Monterey, the capital of New Leon, is situated on the San Juan river, where it comes out of the mountains—the city (which contains a population of about twelve thousand) being in part surrounded by them—at the head of a large and beautiful valley. The houses are of stone, in the Moorish style, with flat roofs, which, with their strongly enclosed yards and gardens in high stone walls, all looped for musketry, make them each a fortress within itself. It is the most important place in Northern Mexico, (or on the east side of Sierra Madre,) commanding the only pass or road for carriages from this side, between it and the Gulf of Mexico, to the table-lands of the Sierra, by or through which the city of Mexico can be reached.

I much fear I shall have exhausted your patience before you get half through this long and uninteresting letter. If so, you can only commit it to the flames, and think no more about it, as I write in great haste, besides being interrupted every five minutes; so that you must make great allow-

ances for blots, interliniations, and blunders, as well as want of connexion in many parts of the same.

Be so good as to present me most kindly to your excellent lady, and accept my sincere wishes for your good health, prosperity, and fame.

I remain, truly and sincerely, your friend,

Z. TAYLOR.

MR. MARCY'S REPRIMAND.

WAR DEPARTMENT, WASHINGTON, *January 27, 1847.*

SIR: I deem it proper to send to you a letter (taken from a newspaper) which first appeared in the "New York Morning Express," and has since, as a matter of course, been transferred to many other journals. I learn from General Gaines that the letter is genuine. This information, I am assured, he had previously given to others. As the letter was not marked "confidential," he adjudged that circumstances existed which justified the publication of some part of it, though he expresses an opinion that it was not written with such a view.

It will, in a short time, be in possession of our enemy; and coming, as it does, from the General to whom the conduct of the war, on our part, was confided, it will convey most valuable information to the Mexican Commander, not only in relation to our present line of operations, but as to the new one, which alone, in your opinion, can be taken with a prospect of success, if an attempt is to be made on the city of Mexico.

The disclosure of your views, as to the future operations of our forces, accompanied, as it is, with your opinion, that the fruits of the war, if completely successful, will be of little worth to us, will, it is greatly to be feared, not only embarrass our subsequent movements, but disincline the enemy to enter into negotiations for peace. With particular reference to these effects, the publication is most deeply to be regretted.

The 650th paragraph of the General Regulations of the Army, published March 1, 1825, declares that "Private letters or reports, relative to military marches and operations are frequently mischievous in design, and always disgraceful to the army. They are therefore strictly forbidden, and any officer found guilty of making such report for publication, without special permission, or of placing the writing beyond his control, so that it finds its way to the press, within one month after the termination of the campaign to which it relates, shall be dismissed from the service."

This paragraph was not included in the compilation of the General Regulations, published in 1841, but is deemed peculiarly applicable to a state of war, and the President has directed it to be republished, and the observance of it strictly enjoined upon all officers.

I have the honor to be, very respectfully, your obedient servant, W. L. MARCY,

Major General Z. TAYLOR, *U. S. Army, in Mexico.*

Secretary of War.

LETTER FROM GENERAL TAYLOR TO MR. MARCY.

HEADQUARTERS ARMY OF OCCUPATION, *Agua Nueva, March 3, 1847.*

SIR: I have had the honor to receive your communication of January 27th, enclosing a newspaper slip, and expressing the regret of the Department that the letter copied in that slip, and which was addressed by myself to Major General Gaines, should have been published.

Although your letter does not convey the direct censure of the Department or of the President, yet, when it is taken in connexion with the revival of a paragraph in the regulations of 1825, touching the publication of private letters concerning operations in the field, I am not permitted to doubt that I have become the subject of Executive disapprobation. To any expression of it, coming with the authority of the President, I am bound by my duty, and by my respect for his high office, patiently to submit; but, lest my silence should be construed into a tacit admission of the grounds and conclusions set forth in your communication, I deem it a duty which I owe to myself to submit a few remarks in reply. I shall be pardoned for speaking plainly.

In the first place, the published letter bears upon its face the most conclusive evidence that it was intended only for private perusal, and not at all for publication. It was published without my knowledge, and contrary to my wishes. Surely, I need not say that I am not in the habit of writing for the newspapers. The letter was a familiar one, written to an old military friend, with whom I have for many years interchanged opinions on professional subjects. That he should think proper, under any circumstances, to publish it could not have been foreseen by me.

In the absence of proof that the publication was made with my authority or knowledge, I may be permitted to say that the quotation in your letter of the six hundred and fiftieth paragraph of the superseded regulations of 1825, in which the terms "mischievous" and "disgraceful" are employed to characterize certain letters or reports, conveys,

though not openly, a measure of rebuke which, to say the least, is rather harsh, and which many may think not warranted by the premises. Again: I have carefully examined the letter in question, and I do not admit that it is obnoxious to the objections urged in your communication. I see nothing in it which, under the same circumstances, I would not write again. To suppose that it will give the enemy valuable information, touching our past or prospective line of operations, is to know very little of the Mexican sources of information, or of their extraordinary sagacity and facilities in keeping constantly apprized of our movements.

As to my particular views in regard to the general policy to be pursued towards Mexico, I perceive by the public journals that they are shared by many distinguished statesmen, and also in part by a conspicuous officer of the navy, the publication of whose opinions is not perhaps obstructed by any regulations of his Department. It is difficult, then, to imagine that the diffusion of mine can render any peculiar aid to the enemy, or specially discline him "to enter into negotiations for peace."

In conclusion, I would say that it has given me great pain to be brought into the position in which I now find myself with regard to the Department of War and the Government. It has not been of my own seeking. To the extent of my ability, and the means placed at my disposal, I have sought faithfully to serve the country by carrying out the wishes and instructions of the Executive. But it cannot be concealed that since the capitulation of Monterey the confidence of the Department, and I too much fear of the President, has been gradually withdrawn, and my consideration and usefulness correspondingly diminished. The apparent determination of the Department to place me in an attitude antagonistical to the Government has an apt illustration in the well-known fable of Esop.* But I ask no favor, and I shrink from no responsibility. While entrusted with the command in this quarter I shall continue to devote all my energies to the public good, looking for my reward to the consciousness of pure motives and the final verdict of impartial history.

I am, sir, very respectfully, your obedient servant,

Z. TAYLOR,

Maj. Gen. U. S. A., commanding.

Hon. W. L. MARCY, Secretary of War, Washington.

* THE WOLF AND THE LAMB.

One hot, sultry day, a Wolf and a Lamb happened to come, just at the same time, to quench their thirst in the stream of a clear, silver brook that ran tumbling down the side of a rocky mountain. The Wolf stood upon the higher ground, and the Lamb at some distance from him down the current. However, the Wolf, having a mind to pick a quarrel with him, asked him, what he meant by disturbing the water, and making it so muddy that he could not drink? and, at the same time, demanded satisfaction. The Lamb, frightened at this threatening charge, told him, in a tone as mild as possible, that, with humble submission, he could not conceive how that could be; since the water which he drank, ran down from the Wolf to him, and therefore it could not be disturbed so far up the stream. "Be that as it will," replies the Wolf, "you are a rascal, and I have been told that you treated me with ill language, behind my back, about half a year ago,"—"Upon my word," says the Lamb, "the time you mention was before I was born." The Wolf, finding it to no purpose to argue any longer against truth, fell into a great passion, snarling and foaming at the mouth, as if he had been mad; and drawing nearer to the Lamb, "Sirrah," says he, "if it was not you, it was your father, and that is all one." So he seized the poor innocent helpless thing, tore it to pieces, and made a meal of it.

APPLICATION.

The thing which is pointed at in this fable is so obvious, that it will be impertinent to multiply words about it. When a cruel ill-natured man has a mind to abuse one inferior to himself, either in power or courage, though he has not given the least occasion for it, how does he resemble the Wolf! whose envious, rapacious temper could not bear to see innocence live quietly in its neighborhood. In short, wherever ill people are in power, innocence and integrity are sure to be persecuted; the more vicious the community is, the better countenance they have for their own villainous measures. To practice honesty in bad times, is being liable to suspicion enough; but if any one should dare to prescribe it, it is ten to one but he would be impeached of high crimes and misdemeanors; for to stand up for justice in a degenerate and corrupt State, is tacitly to upbraid the Government, and seldom fails of pulling down vengeance upon the head of him that offers to stir in its defence. Where cruelty and malice are in combination with power, nothing is so easy as for them to find a pretence to tyrannize over innocence, and exercise all manner of injustice.



